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## Interim Report on Mass Transportation

City Club of Portland (Portland, Or.)

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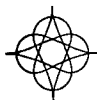
**PORTLAND**  
*City Club*  
**BULLETIN**

Crystal Room • Benson Hotel  
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**INTERIM REPORT**  
**on**  
**MASS TRANSPORTATION**



Research Institute. Proposed by Pat Dowling.

*The Committee:* JOHN A. CARLSON, WALTER A. DURHAM, JR., RICHARD E. RITZ,  
JAMES M. STEWART, KENNETH WINTERS, and NORMAN A. STOLL, *Chairman*.

To be presented and acted upon by the membership this Friday, March 1, 1957

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**ELECTED TO MEMBERSHIP**

DR. FRED ERIC JOSEPH, Dentist.

Proposed by Dr. Alexander Levy.

PHILIP D. LANG, Administrative Assistant to the Mayor, City of Portland.

Proposed by Terry D. Schrunk.

G. PRENTISS LEE, M. D.

Proposed by Carl N. Reynolds.

WILLIAM S. ROYCE, Economist. Manager, Pacific Northwest Office, Stanford

## **INTERIM REPORT** **on** **MASS TRANSPORTATION**

### **To the Board of Governors The City Club of Portland:**

Since commencing its studies, your committee has assembled a considerable amount of data concerning mass transportation in Portland and elsewhere. It has examined transit company records, City Council minutes, numerous official reports and other documents concerning transportation, and much other literature. It has interviewed transit company officials, city officials, and others who have information or points of view bearing on the study. It has analyzed financial, accounting and statistical data reflecting the history of transit operations in Portland, has studied the franchise under which the local company operated for twenty years, has examined proposals for continuation of services after expiration of franchise, has considered various proposals for incorporation in a new franchise and has given some consideration to the valuation and other problems which must be worked out incident to the continuation of transit services. Your Committee also has made some effort to compare the community's continuing investment in transit with its investment in other transportation facilities, tabulating the cost incident to the movement of vehicular traffic in general and comparing these to the cost of mass transit operations.

Throughout these studies a major problem of the committee has been to strike some reasonable balance in covering the subject matter sufficiently, narrowing its scope to limits manageable by a volunteer committee, and, at the same time, providing, the community with the benefit of the study in time to be of some use. The formidable proportions of the subject matter and the constantly changing pattern of the transit crises which seem to be a permanent part of the Portland landscape have made it impracticable to date to assemble the comprehensive transportation report which at one time was anticipated. However, the committee has made interim reports directed to particular conditions under active consideration by city officials and the citizenry at large.

Your committee has made three presentations to the Club and has aided a special committee in a fourth. A sub-committee of this committee made its first presentation in reference to the ballot measure which in November 1952 proposed the creation of a transit and parking commission. In October 1954 the full committee submitted a report on the ballot measure then before the citizens, proposing a transit commission and a ten-year levy in connection therewith. In that report, which went somewhat beyond the usual scope of a committee report on a ballot measure, some of the problems incident to the imminent expiration of the local transit company's franchise were discussed at length. In July 1955 the City Club arranged a forum on the parking problem, following completion of the report of the Citizens' Committee on Off-street Parking, and recently, members of this committee assisted a special committee which this last fall reported on the ballot measure proposing the establishment of a parking authority.

At the time this report was written, the city and the company were again engaged in a "sparring match" which includes the issues of increased fares and standards of services. At the same an investigation by the State Public Utilities Commissioner into Clackamas County service has high-lighted the problem of suburban transit as well as the inter-corporate relations of the group of companies which have been primarily concerned with service to the metropolitan area as a whole.

Your committee has long since been convinced of the necessity for taking certain steps, indispensable to satisfactory, long-range solution to Portland's transportation problems. With a new city administration, and with a new legislature in session, it is considered timely to reiterate these conclusions now. Hence, without embarking upon any discussion or analysis of the statistical accounting, or legal data the Committee has assembled, this further interim report is released with recommendations pertinent to decisions of immediate public urgency.

## OBJECTIVES OF A MASS TRANSIT SYSTEM

The sharp drop in patronage of the local transportation lines following World War II is causing many public private agencies to restudy the shortcomings of present transportation systems and to face the broad question of just what are the objectives of mass transportation in a growing metropolitan area.

The most efficient system of transportation over short distances is travel afoot. Where walking is feasible, all the ideals of mass transportation are present: Door-to-door delivery at practically instantaneous starting schedules—both ways, and at almost no cost. And, as has often been pointed out, even in a major metropolitan center or a suburban shopping or industrial center, a person must almost always become a pedestrian before he can become a shopper or a worker.

Yet breadwinners in an industrial society seldom live, work, and shop in close enough proximity to permit much travel on foot. As our society becomes more urbanized and our populations become more concentrated, travel afoot becomes less and less feasible as the sole method of commutation. The larger the metropolitan area, the more essential becomes the need for efficiency in moving persons to and from their places of employment, shopping, study, or recreation. Our present metropolitan development and the concentration of people in our downtown area are themselves largely the product of the development of mass transportation which was relatively efficient at the time of its installation. Thus, growth necessitates improved transportation, and improved transportation encourages growth. Congestion, confusion, and strangulation occur when growth outstrips the capacity of transportation facilities to meet such growth.

In a literal sense, the transportation system constitutes the circulatory system of the capacity for orderly development. For many years the Portland area has shown signs of "hardening of the arteries", and the chronic and progressive character of the illness has been the subject of study not only by City Club and other civic committees, but—on too rare occasions—by professional transportation experts.

Except for a few experts who are hired to propagandize or otherwise to foster and promote the merits of particular types of conveyances, transportation economists are nearly unanimous in diagnosing the problem of mass transportation as one of moving *not vehicles*, but *people*. Once this concept of the problem is recognized, the search for solutions to mass transportation can be facilitated: how to make it possible for people to move efficiently, cheaply, and pleasantly. The failure to reach solutions may by unnecessary decentralization, further distort metropolitan growth, with resulting loss of civic and tax values.

Too many transportation studies, not only in Portland but in other metropolitan cities, have tackled only part of the transportation problem. The members of your committee became convinced, early in their work, that a piecemeal approach would not lead to rational solutions of the growing problem of moving people in the Portland metropolitan area. Off-street parking, development of limited access expressways, faster mass-transit vehicles, improved scheduling and routing, tariffs, meter fees and locations, municipal subsidies—all these are but specialized phases of Portland's basic transportation problem—which in the early part of 1957 gives strong promise of becoming not only a problem, but a crisis. The city has only a limited area of street space, and efficient conservation and use of street space should be a major consideration in the many phases of the overall transportation problem in the metropolitan area.

During his return to Portland last spring, a nationally recognized architect and planner warned that Portland must develop long-range plans for its future growth. For example, the construction of Lloyd Center, projected as the nation's largest shopping area, will add a second nucleus to Portland's mid-town area and will greatly affect—if not vastly complicate—the trans-Willamette traffic problem. That is not to say that development of this second "down-town" is a bad thing. It is merely illustrative of the growing pains of all our expanding metropolitan centers and of Portland's in particular. Urban communities are living organisms whose health is heavily dependent upon effective internal communication. Solutions cannot be found without planning ahead—planning with full regard for the total needs of the growing organism.

## **GUIDEPOSTS FOR DEALING WITH THE MASS TRANSPORTATION PROBLEM**

The Portland City Planning Commission, during the past few years, has assembled a wealth of data and published a series of reports dealing with bus transportation, parking, population growth and vehicle trip desire patterns. There is no lack of talent in developing these basic data, nor even in setting forth projections therefrom into the future.

Your committee, however, finds a serious lack of imagination and initiative on the part of city officials in developing long-range policies that seem to be indicated by the basic data already available. While thousands of man-hours of time are being devoted to matters such as the location of an \$8 million exposition-recreation center, almost no consistent effort seems to be applied to the development of a coordinated transportation policy for either the city or the Portland metropolitan area as a whole. At present the citizens are spending for transportation private and public funds totalling an estimated \$80 million annually, not to mention the untold hours lost by automobile commuters in piloting "one-man transit vehicles" into and out of the city each day.

It has truly been said that "transportation is the life-blood of the city". Without adequate transportation of persons and goods, a city suffers strangulation which will slow down or even stop its growth. Yet in Portland no over-all, coordinated attack is being made on the transportation problem. Patch-work palliatives are attempted: off-street parking, wider streets, synchronized signalization, better bridges, and expressways.

At every hand there appears mounting evidence of the inefficiencies of the private automobile as a means of solving the city's transportation problems. But the private automobile continues to be favored in most aspects of state, county, and city transportation planning. Planning experts point out that as the urban area approaches a population of one million, rail rapid transit will have to be used to break through the limitations imposed by present-day reliance on private automobiles. The Planning Commission's report on Population Growth forecasts a 1975 population of 1,019,000 persons in the Portland urban area, compared to the 1950 total of 600,000 for this 436 square mile area extending from Oregon City to Vancouver and from Troutdale to Aloha. Your committee finds no evidence that existing and potential rapid transit routes are being preserved or even given serious study. On the contrary, our city and county officials seem bent on discouraging the use of the only rail route (from Oregon City and Bell Rose into Portland) that carries passengers today. It is significant that, even in the face of its owners' apparent desire to abandon passenger service, this route has seen only a slight decline in annual passenger traffic during 1951-1956, whereas the urban bus lines have suffered a decline of approximately 50 percent in the same period. The city, county and state have not yet displayed evidence of joint cooperation in preserving entry of this route to downtown Portland.

As of the time of the City Planning Commission's parking study, 63 square blocks of downtown Portland area, comprising 21 percent of the land area of the heart of the city, were devoted to off-street parking, and the proportion of downtown land so used has continued to grow. There may be increasing pressure for more such off-street parking areas, as expressways come into use and vehicular density grows. But the use of downtown property for parking vehicles thwarts the very reason for the existence of a city: concentrated areas of business and shopping facilities, easily accessible by foot. Moreover, the resulting congestion further slows up movement of mass transit vehicles and makes them even less attractive as a mode of transportation.

No one seems to question the fact that the mass-transit vehicle uses far less city space per person than the private automobile. If the concept of "acre-hours" were used, the contrast would be even more favorable to the mass transit vehicle, which is in motion most of the time compared to hours of idle time spent in curb or off-street parking by the private vehicle. We therefore strongly suggest that the public vehicle should be favored rather than hampered and that its promotion should receive at least as serious consideration as private vehicular traffic.

The most serious gap in city planning in this field is the lack of representation of all groups and interests in passenger transportation. Policy in this area has been dominated by highway engineers rather than being balanced through the addition of representatives of other interests.

Obviously the automobile is here to stay. Large numbers of people are completely dependent upon it for their urban transportation; many more prefer it; and these needs and preferences must be recognized in any comprehensive planning of transportation facilities. Certainly the great preponderance of money spent on transportation in Multnomah County (upwards of 4-5) is spent on private vehicular traffic. But the city cannot function as a city without effective mass transportation; and further deterioration of mass transit facilities means deterioration of the city's tax base, the further pyramiding of the costs of private vehicular traffic and, perhaps worst of all, the serious burden of inconvenience on those travelers who use mass transportation facilities.

Our public officials are remiss in discharging a truly major responsibility if they fail to take the steps necessary to assure adequate mass transportation facilities. They cannot approach this task unless they recognize that mass transit and private vehicular traffic are all part of a single problem, equip themselves with sufficient technical assistance to enable them to understand what they are doing, and coordinate efforts of all interested governmental units and public bodies.

## **PUBLIC ORGANIZATION RELATING TO TRANSPORTATION SERVICES**

Such control as the city has over mass transportation facilities and service is vested in the City Council, and from time to time—normally on the occasion of some emergency—it is called upon to deliberate upon changes in the transit company's franchise or permit. This occurs most frequently upon company applications for changes in routes, but at times for changes in schedules, fares, and equipment, or for adjustment of payments due the city. Except for work leading to the transit modernization program effected in the late 1940's and the City's ballot proposal for a transit commission advanced prior to the termination of the recently-expired franchise of the transit company, the initiative for Council action has been taken by the company. Although the company has been required to submit periodic reports which are filed with the City Auditor, there appears to be little evidence of any continuing official surveillance of transit operations within the city, or of a serious effort to coordinate transit operations with other activities of the city pertaining to traffic. The reason for this malaise is not difficult to find. Immediate direction of transit matters is vested in the Commissioner of Utilities, who, despite his responsibility for other matters, has only part-time general staff assistance relating to mass transportation problems, and intermittent volunteer help from citizens. Indeed, until recent months, the present Commissioner of Utilities was the only Commissioner who did not have a general administrative assistant. For expert aid in dealing with mass transportation matters, the Commissioner of Utilities has had to call upon the City Traffic Engineer (normally in regard to routing problems), the City Lighting Engineer in regard to general advice concerning the future of transit operations, and the City Attorney.

Aside from traffic regulation functions of the Bureau of Police, the remaining municipal functions pertaining to transportation are under the direction of the Commissioner of Public Works, who, in addition to his responsibility for construction, maintenance and regulation of streets and bridges under city jurisdiction, supervises the work of the City Traffic Engineer. Responsibilities of this commissioner, so far as these concern transportation, are oriented primarily to the smooth flowing of private vehicular traffic, and satisfactory solutions of parking problems. It is almost inevitable, with this division of functions, that employees under his jurisdiction will tend to subordinate mass transportation problems to the demands of private vehicular traffic.

In fairness to the Council, it should be pointed out that, under existing institutional arrangements, the Council is not completely the master of its own house insofar as control of transportation facilities is concerned. Jurisdiction over certain streets, bridges, and expressways is shared with the County and the State. The State, in turn, is subject to standards and controls under the federal highway program which leave the City with a minimum of influence over the federal-state highways within the city, especially in the urban aid features of the new federal program.

The resulting fragmentation and neglect of public responsibilities are not conducive either to the effective or the economical solution of the city's transit and traffic problems. What steps the Council is taking to coordinate and unify control of these problems are not apparent. (1)

In the fall of 1954 your committee submitted to the membership a report on a ballot measure which proposed the establishment of a new city transit department in charge of a five-man transit commission to be appointed by the Mayor with Council approval. In that report, adopted by the membership, your committee recommended disapproval of the ballot measure primarily on the following grounds: that it failed to provide means for coming to grips with the decisions necessary to a solution to Portland's metropolitan area transportation problems; that the making of these decisions was the responsibility of the City Council and would be no less so under the ballot measure if enacted into law, and that enactment of the measure therefore would create in the general public of Portland a false sense of security concerning the future of its mass transportation problem.

In addition to disapproving the ballot measure, that report outlined the steps considered indispensable to a minimum solution of the city's transit problems and went on to make the following positive recommendation:

"The City Club go on record as urging the Council itself to assume direct responsibility for the decisions that must be made in connection with the imminent expiration of the Traction Company's franchise, and to hire such technical assistance and make such other arrangements as may be necessary to permit the Council itself to exercise an intelligent judgment on the issues presented by expiration of the franchise".

In its discussion of the measure, your committee pointed out that the provision of transportation services on an economical basis "must begin with a soundly conceived rapid transit plan for this area," and that this process requires that the City Council decide what standards of service the city expects, assess the cost and feasibility of itself providing that level of service, and explore the ability and willingness of potential private operators to supply such service at a charge which is reasonable and comparable to the rate at which the City would be able and willing to supply it. It was quite apparent to the committee that a major difficulty was the inability or unwillingness of the community to come to grips with the problem of equating service standards to charges on anything but a piecemeal or temporary basis.

Your committee outlined various research projects which had been undertaken in the past and which might be utilized in the process of necessary decision-making, and projected an outline of the studies which must be undertaken to provide assurance that informed judgment would be called into play in dealing with the mass transportation problem. Your committee is appalled at the failure of the City Council to take any tangible and substantial steps in the directions indicated.

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(1) *Since this report was prepared, the Mayor of Portland, on February 11, 1957, announced plans to center traffic and transit problems in a special bureau of transportation. We recognize that this probably is a step in the right direction; but it is only one of a number of actions called for in a total approach to metropolitan area transportation needs, both present and future.*

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the foregoing, your committee recommends:

- (1) that immediate responsibility of the city for dealing with mass transportation matters, for dealing with all other problems of traffic planning and movement (possibly short of police functions), and for evolving a consolidated transportation plan for Portland, should be vested in a single commissioner. (2) This concentration of immediate responsibility should not be construed to relieve the Council as a whole of its direct responsibility for the policy decisions which must be made in evolving long-range coordinated transportation policy.
- (2) that the commissioner in charge of transportation matters should be provided with adequate technical assistants who have a continuing responsibility for consideration of mass transit problems, either through reassignment functions of existing city personnel, the hiring of new employees, or consultants, or a combination of such steps. The technical problems in this task are too great to leave to the commissioners personally or to entrust to any volunteer citizens' group, however competent.
- (3) that the Council should evolve a positive program for keeping the citizenry informed concerning mass transit and other transportation matters, and for eliciting broad volunteer participation in shaping the decisions which must be made in regard to the minimum level of services to be demanded, the allocation of the costs of such services, and the permanent organization for achieving these services on an economical and effective basis. These are policy decisions which the Council cannot delegate to its experts or any citizens' group but such groups can help achieve solutions for which broad public support will and must be assured. To this end the Mayor should appoint an advisory committee whose function should be to work with the Council, the city's technical experts and various volunteer citizens' groups in focusing attention on the transportation problems of the city's metropolitan area. Such advisory group should include persons who represent the interests of suburban municipalities, as well as transportation consumers and producers.
- (4) that the Council should evolve a program for the continuation of essential mass transportation services in the event of termination of the present permit before a permanent transit franchise or other permanent program is worked out. The time for negotiating such permanent transit arrangements is growing short, and the city's bargaining position may be further jeopardized.
- (5) that the City Council should recommend to the legislative assembly such legislation as will facilitate the coordination of mass transportation services within the entire metropolitan area. Such legislation should include authorization for the creation of local transit authorities with adequate powers to assure all necessary mass transportation facilities and services.

*Respectfully submitted,*

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NORMAN A. STOLL, *Chairman*

Approved February 19, 1957 by the Research Board for transmittal to the Board of Governors.

Received by the Board of Governors February 25, 1957 and ordered printed and submitted to the membership for discussion and action.

*(2) On February 20, 1957, the Council retained an engineer and rate accountant to undertake a preliminary study and report in connection with the company's application for a fare increase. While this, too, is a step in the right direction, the limit of \$1200 placed on the fee for this service indicates that its scope falls far short of what is needed.*